



DELAWARE

DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

NEWS RELEASE

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Historic Audiotape Discovered of President Kennedy's Dedication Speech for the Opening of Delaware Turnpike One Week Before His Assassination

Dover – Delaware Department of Transportation (DelDOT) announces the discovery of a WDEL radio broadcast of President John F. Kennedy's speech during the dedication ceremonies of the Delaware Turnpike, the first completed section of Interstate 95, on November 14, 1963. This audio has been combined with still photographs to create a video available for viewing on DelDOT's Interstate Highway System - 50th Anniversary Webpage at: http://deldot.gov/static/interstate_50th/index.shtml.

The discovery of the audiotape was the result of a DelDOT Public Relation research project pertaining to the 50-year anniversary of the Federal Highway System. A framed photograph of the ribbon cutting on display in the DelDOT's Administration Building in Dover led Public Relations' Bob King on a quest for news coverage of what was to be President Kennedy's last public appearance for a public works project. King was surprised to learn that the State Archives only had a printed copy of the speech. King then contacted John McClement, of Delmarva Broadcasting (which owns WDEL), who indicated there was a slim possibility that one of WDEL's former newsmen might have kept a copy.

McClement provided the name and contact information for Joe Mosbrook, then news director for WDEL and now retired and living in Ohio. He had covered the ribbon cutting in 1963 and then combined the dialog of that event with an end of year retrospective tribute to the then assassinated president.

"We decided to cover the dedication live on radio," describes Joe Mosbrook. "WDEL newsman Burke Hull and I did the reporting of the event. A month later I was producing a traditional year-end review broadcast for WDEL, and, mainly because of the assassination of President Kennedy, a week later decided to use some of the audio on that year-end review broadcast. While it was virtually impossible to save all the station's news clips (dozens every day), I did save a tape of the year-end program."

Mosbrook left WDEL in 1967 to join NBC News in Cleveland and worked as a reporter at the NBC radio and television stations for about 35 years before retiring a few years ago. He said when he got the inquiry about the turnpike dedication, he searched through his old tapes in his home in Cleveland Heights, Ohio, and found the clip.

King, a Community Relations Officer for Public Relations and Tim O'Brien, DelDOT Photographer, then took the next step. Searching through the Delaware State Archives revealed a cache of photographs of the event, many actually showing Mosbrook among the crowd and at the press table. These historic photographs were matched with the dialog from the radio report by Steve LePage, of DelDOT's Technical and Support Services Division of the Office of Information Technology (OIT), to recreate a visual retrospective of the event.

Joe Mosbrook reminisced:

While highway dedication ceremonies are usually not high-interest news events, that one was special because the popular president participated. It obviously took on added significance when Kennedy was killed a week later. When I first heard about the assassination, one of my first thoughts was that just a few days earlier I had been within a few feet of him at the turnpike dedication. During the turnpike broadcast I was surprised by the relative lack of security for the president. He just jumped into the crowd and shook hands with everybody and anybody who was there.

In later years, working for NBC, I covered many presidential events and was never able to get that close to a president without all sorts of security checks and precautions. Of course, the later security measures resulted from the JFK assassination.

In addition to the obvious travel improvements provided by the turnpike, I remember that ceremony as one of the last events of an era before the United States lost its innocence.

The video clip can be viewed under "Video Footage" on DelDOT's Interstate Highway System - 50th Anniversary Webpage: http://deldot.gov/static/interstate_50th/index.shtml



Joe Mosbrook in 1963



Joe Mosbrook today



Joe Mosbrook (with dark overcoat and sun glasses) sitting at the press table during the dedication ceremony, November 14, 1963.

For further information contact DelDOT Public Relations at 1-800-652-5600 (in DE) or 302-760-2080 or write to the above address. JPEG's of attached photographs may be obtained for new release purposes by emailing Bob King at bob.king@state.de.us.

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